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# BEST PRACTICES IN ONLINE LEARNING FOR LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Peter Christopherson

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# **BEST PRACTICES IN ONLINE LEARNING FOR LANGUAGE LEARNERS**

by

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A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Second Language

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

August 2020

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

#### Overview

During the coronavirus pandemic in the spring of 2020, nearly 1.5 billion students and over 60 million teachers had their school doors close and many of them were thrown into the throes of online education (Strauss, 2020). Online education, distance learning, or e-learning as it is sometimes called is not a new thing. In the past, online education was a pathway that some students chose if it fit their needs. In its nature, being apart from the physical classroom and teacher, students have to be more self-regulated and able to work independently (Yates, 2004). However, because of the pandemic, millions of students and educators alike have been forced to adapt to it as the new norm of education regardless of their wishes or abilities to manage this new mode of instruction. To better understand our new landscape, its challenges and opportunities, I have chosen to learn more about online education and how we can best design our classes and motivate students in order to achieve positive language learning outcomes. Additionally, because my teaching specialty is teaching English as a Second Language, I've sought to best understand what kinds of activities are going to be the most engaging and beneficial for language learners when class is held in an online format. This has led me to ask: *What are the most effective ways to help language learners to be successful in an online learning format?*

In order to answer this question, it will be necessary to understand online learning and all it entails to the greatest degree possible. After sharing my experiences with online

learning, I will explain the main themes that underpin a successful online learning experience for language learners: online learning and language learning strategies, motivation, course design, and effective online language learning teaching.

## **My Online Learning Experience**

### ***Benefits of Online Learning***

In my career as a student, I have taken around 15 classes in an online format. Learning online from different teachers and in different subjects, I've been able to get some anecdotal evidence on the benefits and limitations of online learning. Certainly, being able to break the confines of space and time can be a great asset to learning. I completed my Minnesota high school degree while living in Costa Rica, and I earned my teaching license through Hamline University in St. Paul while living and working in Rochester, Minnesota. You can learn in the environment that suits you best, be it a quiet library, the comfortable couch in your living room, or my personal favorite: a busy coffee shop. It can be possible to get in an uninterrupted flow that can lead to epiphanies and learning breakthroughs. Additionally, it can make the world a small place, connecting you with students and instructors across the world that can bring a variety of enlightening perspectives. I have made life long friends with some of my classmates that are studying on the other side of the world. Furthermore, it requires you to be an active participant unlike the potential to passively observe that comes from a face to face classroom, which is a temptation for students at times. It goes without saying, online learning has many positive attributes that an on-campus class cannot offer.

### ***Necessity of Teaching Learning Strategies***

As much as I have appreciated the flexibility and other benefits of online learning, I personally always found online classes incredibly challenging. As I reflect on my experiences, I am certain that the rigor of the content was never to blame for this. I feel the most difficult hurdle for me was my lack of self-regulation. I had never honed my ability to organize myself well and follow a setup plan of strategies that I could use to maximize my learning while minimizing the stress. Instead, I recall, I would often work hard just before a deadline in order to complete my work. I remember frequently feeling like I had not learned or performed at my potential and the whole process or lack of one caused a lot of unnecessary stress. Admitting this now is a bit shameful, but I am aware through my discussions with classmates and most clearly through my research, that I am not alone.

Online learning requires a much higher degree self regulation than a typical face to face classroom. In an on campus environment, student deliverables come at a predictable pace set by the teacher. Also, there is often a set aside time for students to work with material in the classroom with the teacher's help; accessing and understanding the help is not difficult. However, neither of these things, the set pace or the accessible help and study time, are a part of a typical online classroom. Students are typically given a week to complete work, but how and when they divide up their week is up to them. This is a huge step in the degree of freedom that many are not prepared for. I recall it being a real struggle to stick to a schedule of my own making. Also, in regards to accessing a teacher for help in an online classroom, I remember feeling a sense of shame

in asking simple questions from a teacher. It is clear that the nature of online learning requires an individual to be more responsible, and this cannot be done overnight. The best way to do this is through training students to use strategies that are specific to online learning.

### ***Motivation***

Another element of online learning that is a key to success is motivation. Motivation is an abstract concept that has been studied from many different angles. One suitable definition states that motivation is the force that instigates and sustains effort towards a goal (Meece, Pintrick, & Schunck, 2008). As was mentioned, I was one of those students who was not ready for the amount of freedom found in online classes. Looking back now, I struggled to find the motivation to work when I wasn't sitting at a desk with a teacher in front of me. In addition to the normal distractions of life that you might find at home, your classroom, when learning online, is on the internet. It's safe to say that the internet, though filled with any incredible amount of useful information, is one of the most distracting things ever invented. Throughout teaching during the coronavirus pandemic, it is safe to say that many other students aside from myself are experiencing these distractions and are searching for their motivation to do their work. Because of the distinct difference in motivation needed between face to face and online classes, it is imperative that instructors understand the complexity of motivation and how they can influence it to help their students be successful.



### ***Course Design***

In addition to my own deficiencies, another reason I have disliked online classes is how easy it is to become cognitively overwhelmed. When you walk into an on campus class, it is almost always clear what you are supposed to do. If a teacher is talking, you listen. After they have talked, they will have most likely given some materials and directions. I can't recall feeling frustrated because I wasn't sure what the teacher wanted me to do. Conversely, I have had many experiences where upon logging in to a class for online learning, I have felt completely overwhelmed, unable to know where to start. The nature of an online class means that all the information that would typically be given out at a comprehensible pace, with time for questions and reflection, is given or at least available all at one time. This fact can be especially troublesome when the majority of the information is given in text in an academic and not social form. If we wish for our students to be successful, we must take into account how our classes are viewed by our students, making them as understandable and interesting as possible.

### ***Effective Online Language Learning Teaching***

I have loved learning languages ever since I studied Spanish in Minnesota in high school and spent three months in Costa Rica where I first unsuccessfully tried to apply what I had learned from the classroom into real life. It is easy for me to remember the feeling I had when I tried to speak or write. I was angry. There was little that I had learned in the classroom actually helped me to communicate. Understanding others and expressing yourself through very limited language was and is a humbling experience.

Instead of continuing with my classroom style Spanish, I became an astute listener, comparing what I was hearing with how I would have expressed it, noticing the difference and changing my way of understanding and speaking the language. This noticing the gap is the cornerstone of language learning and promoting its occurrence is an essential part of language teaching.

In order to replicate the kinds of situations where students can compare their language with native like speakers, note the difference, and change their language accordingly, careful design of activities is a must. The traditional way of teaching language through endless grammar memorization without a real world purpose, or a mountain of red ink on a piece of written work has not died out, unfortunately. This format does not allow students to grow for a variety of reasons, but most importantly, it doesn't get them comfortable communicating with a real audience, while attending to the differences they notice in their language compared to native speakers. Thankfully, an online format can lend itself well to this kind of teaching if the class is designed with care.

## **Summary**

Online learning has been an ever growing method of instruction up until this point, and now because of the coronavirus, it is ubiquitous. It is possible the world of education will never be the same, but this need not be a bad thing. If we take on the challenge to teach our students the strategies they need to employ to be successful, to help students discover their motivation, and give well designed opportunities for

language growth, we could come out of this situation as highly effective teachers in a digital age.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Introduction to the Literature Review**

The topics within this chapter are the four most important and relevant themes underpinning successful online learning for language learners. The first section of this literature review focuses on online learning and its benefits and limitations, recommended course design, and the importance of readiness. I've researched the most critical things about online learning in order for teachers to better understand the tool at their disposal. The second section consists of a set of learning strategies specifically useful for online learning and online language learning in order to know the strategies students need to employ to be successful. The third section dives into motivation in order to understand how it relates to online learning performance, as well as how teachers can cultivate it and students can discover it through engaging, purposeful, and well designed online lessons. The last section is about language learning and how it relates to online learning. Theories regarding the most effective ways to learn language, such as the noticing effect and the output hypothesis, are discussed. Other subsections are dedicated to the characteristics of online learning that can be especially useful for language learners, asynchronous discussions, online language exchange programs, and improved means to provide feedback. The purpose of my research is to understand the best practices of online learning for language learners, and this requires knowledge of the online learning environment, learning strategies, motivation and language learning.

Research Question: What are the most effective ways to help language learners to be successful in an online learning format?

## **Online Learning**

Online learning has become more and more popular in recent years as the ubiquity and utility of the internet has grown. A careful examination of the benefits and limitations of this style of learning is necessary to see what an instructor can do to capitalize on its assets and avoid its weaknesses. There are some tenets of online learning that can be used to ensure that an instructor can design a course and that students will be ready to take it.

### ***Benefits***

Online learning really took off when the internet boomed in the early 2000's (Hill, 2006). At the time, many stakeholders reported that they were satisfied with their experience even when compared to a typical classroom experience (Wyatt, 2005). However, as online learning expanded to service a variety of organizations, its place in the world of academia was being questioned (Hill, 2006). Subjashni Appana (2008) stated that while there are many good reasons for the rise of online learning, it still has many limitations that must be carefully considered.

**Flexibility.** Appana (2008) outlined a number of benefits that are useful in understanding the landscape online learning provides, but the greatest of these benefits seems to be flexibility. Online learning allows organizations to reach students in areas of

the world that they wouldn't have been able to otherwise, and this enables global connections that wouldn't be possible otherwise (Appana, 2008). Class sizes increased when an online replica of a traditional class was offered (Appana, 2008). A reason for this change was given in a survey response where students said that the flexibility of not having to attend an on-campus class because it had previously been a barrier for them (Appana, 2008). Furthermore, classes can be run in an asynchronous manner to allow flexibility, or they can be run in a synchronous manner to give students a traditional classroom feel from the comfort of their couch (Appana, 2008). Additionally, Appana (2008) notes that with online learning at the college level, students aren't required to put their other responsibilities on hold; they can work or take care of their children while attending. Hill (2006) examined this flexibility closely and divided it into two categories:

**Information Delivery.** Whereas traditional classrooms often depend on dated printed material, the speed of updating and delivery of materials is another asset to online learning (Appana, 2008). The development of learning management systems and web resources has drastically transformed both distance education and online education programs by speeding up the rate at which information can be disseminated and digested (Finger, McGlasson, & Finger, 2007).

**Anonymity.** An online learning format can allow students to participate anonymously. Because of the anonymous nature of online learning, equity and participation is increased (Chester & Gwynn, 1998). This can help shy students contribute more often and it can give students an opportunity to reconstruct their identity if they so choose (Appana, 2008). Another popular use of anonymity is being able to ask

clarifying questions to an instructor on a public forum without fear (Appana, 2008).

Chester and Gwynn (1998) note that this is a considerable benefit, being that a major goal in teaching is to help students think of themselves as critical thinkers and to concentrate on the concepts being taught and their perceptions of those concepts, not just the social implications of their opinions.

### **Limitations**

**Readiness.** As student participation in online learning increases at exponential rates, researchers Lesjak and Sulcic (2002) have found that student readiness holds the greatest influence in student success in an online learning environment. Appana (2008) states that online learning students must be self-directed learners, and to be self-directed requires a good sense of direction. Whereas success depended on readiness, student satisfaction was said to depend more on the instructors ability to deliver quality and effective instruction (Weiner, 2003). An additional limitation to online learning was said to be the difficulty faced by members with limited language skills. Because there could be fast paced conversations happening in difficult academic language simultaneously, it can be very frustrating for these students. Furthermore, students in this category often depend on visual cues for context, so a text-based environment can pose great challenges.

**Technology Issues.** Another difficulty presented by online-learning is the possibility of technological issues that can prevent access to the content. Appana (as first cited by Tyler-Smith, 2006) study that looked at the reasons for high dropout rates of online classes, it was concluded that cognitive overload and a lack of strategies to navigate the learner management system interface and content were critical factors. It

takes time for students to become proficient in online learning, and the frustrations that can come from technological issues can be a significant obstacle (Chakow, 2018).

**Engagement.** Additionally, Appana (2008) states that online education can be impersonal and can lead to student feelings of isolation; one rarely experiences the same level of connection with others that can come through a spontaneous conversation. This is an important characteristic of online learning to consider because it is consistent with findings from previous studies suggesting that purposeful and meaningful interaction in online courses, including specific feedback on student progress is required for students to experience success in online environments (Bishop, Foster, & Ravenna, 2012). Lastly, Tyler-Smith (2006) shares that as helpful as the internet can be, it is common knowledge that one can be easily distracted while working on the internet and fail to complete their work or complete sub-satisfactory work because of their lack of focus.

Baki, Means, Murphy, and Toyama (2013) concluded “purely online learning has been equivalent to face-to-face instruction in effectiveness, and blended approaches have been more effective than instruction offered entirely in face-to-face mode” (p. 35).

Though online learning has its limitations, its ability to provide flexibility, anonymity, and an improved method of delivering a plethora of materials rapidly are considerable advantages. The challenges of readiness, technological issues, and engagement must be overcome by educators in order to produce a successful online learning experience for their students.



### ***Recommended Course Design***

Just as any face-to-face class requires proper design for the best outcomes, online learning does as well. However, being that the role of the educator in an online class is much more facilitative, the students interact more with the course and its setup than the instructor (Grant & Hill, 2006; Salmon, 2004). Therefore, a well thought out and implemented approach is essential to create a successful learning experience (Grant & Hill, 2006; Salmon, 2004).

A good online learning program will allow students to pass through these five stages according to Salmon (2004). The first stage of an e-learning program allows students to gain access to the platform in a welcoming and encouraging manner. Special attention needs to be made to not cognitively overwhelm students; instead, they should be able to become familiar with the program in a low-key manner (Salmon, 2004). Chen, Finger, Ray, Sun, and Yeh (2008) studied the critical factors that influence learner satisfaction in an online learning environment and the major conclusion was that "Content should be carefully designed and presented sparingly" (2008, p. 14). The second stage is online socialization, where students become familiar with communicating through the platform (Salmon, 2004). This is a time to try and bridge cultural, social, and learning environment hurdles. It is important to help gauge the learner's attitude and self-efficacy toward e-learning as it has an influence on e-learning satisfaction (Chen et al., 2008). The third stage is when students become accustomed to exchanging content information (Salmon, 2004). Online learning doesn't require face-to-face interaction, which can cause anxiety and a drop in performance for some learners, so students must

become familiar with the asynchronous, text-based manner of communication (Chen et al., 2008). The fourth stage, the learner begins to construct knowledge on the topic through discussions and course activities (Salmon, 2004). Finally, students ought to reflect on and evaluate the process of learning that they have undergone (Salmon, 2004). Chen et al. noted that instructors' use of a diverse array of assessments would influence student satisfaction (2008). They proposed this because they believe that a learner feels more authentically assessed when they are given a variety of ways to demonstrate their proficiency, and with this, they believe students will have more satisfaction with the course.

A successful e-learning program minimizes the anxiety that can come from being cognitively overwhelmed by information overload and novelty and maximizes the benefits of sociocultural learning through collaborative work (Salmon, 2004). The ease of adoption of the new technology will make for a better chance of satisfaction and success (Chen et al., 2008). Student satisfaction is highest when "technology is transparent and functions both reliably and conveniently, and the course is specifically designed to support learner-centered instructional strategies, and finally the instructors role is that of a facilitator and coach" (Appana, 2008, p. 10).

### ***Importance of Readiness***

As it has been mentioned, a limitation on the effectiveness of online learning is that learners are often not sufficiently ready for the amount of self-directed learning that naturally takes place (Kuama & Intharaksa, 2016; Chen et al., 2008; Weiner, 2003). Benefits of online learning over the traditional classroom environment include a much

greater degree of convenience and flexibility, but without being ready for this new kind of freedom, many students will not be successful without the right approach and skills (Chen, Chou, Hung, & Own, 2010). This is because students coming from the traditional environment must realize their new responsibility to manage their own learning and everything that entails in an online classroom; such as meeting deadlines, actively participating in discussions and activities, and managing their own time (Chen et al., 2010).

The authors Chen et al. (2010) sought to reevaluate a previous tool used to determine student readiness for online learning. The Online Learning Readiness Scale (OLRS) contained five different dimensions: self-directed learning, motivation for learning, computer/internet self-efficacy, learner control, and online communication self-efficacy. Chen et al. (2010) laid out the need for such a scale by reviewing the increasingly significant role online learning plays in education. In their study, Chen et al. (2010) gave a OLRS questionnaire to 1,200 college students enrolled in distance learning classrooms with asynchronous at midterm to determine their own perception of their readiness within the five dimensions previously mentioned. It was found that the participants scored high in their readiness for online communication self-efficacy, motivation for learning, computer/internet self-efficacy, yet students scored themselves lowest in learner control, and self directed learning (Chen et al., 2010). Although they cited a study in their literature review that had said women prefer written communication over men, they did not find any correlation in online learning readiness with gender. However, there was a significant correlation between grade levels and readiness as

Juniors and Seniors scored much higher in the learner control and self-directed learning. The findings were explained by saying "students' maturity may play an important role in their monitoring, managing, control, and motivation relative to online learning" (Chen et al., 2010, p.1087).

Many recommendations were listed to improve younger students' readiness. Because of the freedom that comes with online class, it was recommended that teachers take time at the beginning of the term to make the syllabus and structure of their class very clear so that students could make wise decisions about how to spend their time (Chen et al., 2010; Salmon, 2004). Another important recommendation was to design activities that draw students in; such as voting on issues relevant to them or opportunities to share life experiences (Chen et al., 2010). Lastly, it was suggested that teachers make a point to reach out to any student who might seem disengaged as soon as possible in order to maintain the student's motivation (Chen et al., 2010). A teacher's feedback and communication are essential to keeping students engaged and motivated (Appana, 2008; Bishop, Foster, & Ravenna, 2012).

Instructors ought to customize a course as much as possible to fit the readiness of the students in order to help them achieve the maximum amount of success (Chen et al., 2010). Students will need help in structuring their time and staying motivated, therefore, if students are to take online classes, online learning strategies will be a necessary component of a successful online learning experience (Chen et al., 2010).

## **Learning Strategies**

When comparing online learning with a typical face to face learning experience, one may easily miss an important change that occurs behind the scenes. A teacher must take on a facilitative-type role and the student must take control of their own learning environment which requires a greater level of commitment (Grant & Hill, 2006). Because of this significant shift in roles and responsibilities, it is important that students be taught and use learning strategies that allow them to rise to the occasion and take ownership of their learning experience. Beaven, Gutierrez, and Motzo (2017) note that teachers must realize their new role as one who is not just a master of content, but rather a cultivator of independent learning skills and self-regulation.

### ***Online Learning Strategies***

Kuama and Intharaksa (2016) studied differences in the employment of online learning strategies (OLLS) between successful and unsuccessful online language learners. They also examined the relationship between the use of OLLS and online English learning outcomes. "OLLS are defined as a student's ability to understand and control their learning by employing a range of cognitive, meta-cognitive, resources management strategies and affective strategies in order to achieve online learning goals (Kuama & Intharaksa, 2016, p. 56). Participants in their study rated their use of three different categories of strategies: cognitive, metacognitive, an affection, which relates to their motivation or anxiety. Cognitive strategies are the behaviors students need to apply in order to acquire knowledge while they are participating in the learning environment

(Kuama & Intharaska, 2016). They list six strategies associated with this category: “rehearsal strategies, elaboration strategies, organization strategies, comprehension/critical thinking strategies, and finally, internet skills” (Kuama & Intharaksa, 2016, 56).

In regards to cognitive challenges, students can be confronted with a variety of new tasks, content, and ways of navigating the content that create anxiety and frustration (Appana, 2008; Kuama & Intharaksa, 2016; Tyler-Smith, 2006; Salmon, 2004). Khabbaz and Najjar (2015) found that this new technology phenomena had a direct effect on academic results. They (2015) thought it was due to how the novelty and confusion prevented autonomous learning. It makes sense then that Surjono (2015) found that when an online class's format and activities mirrored those of the students online preferences, students were much more likely to be successful in the class. The online-preferences, though not defined in the study, could be assumed to refer to the frequent visual messages with short amounts of text that are passed between young students.

Meta-cognitive strategies involve the regulation and evaluation of their own learning process (Kuama & Intharaska, 2016). These strategies were divided into seven categories: self regulation/volitional strategies, time management strategies, goal setting strategies, self-monitoring /self-management strategies, self-evaluation strategies, concentration/effort regulation strategies, and self-awareness strategies. Lastly, resources management strategies are defined as the ability to manage their circumstances, be it environment, time, as well as being able to take advantage of peers and adult help. Resource management strategies are divided into three categories: environmental

management strategies, help seeking strategies, and the use of resources/resourcing strategies. Kuama and Intharaksa (2016) cite numerous studies that all demonstrated the positive correlation that use of meta cognitive, cognitive strategies, and resource management has on outcomes.

The study confirmed their beliefs, better academic outcomes consistently came from students who employed OLLS (Kuama & Intharaksa, 2016). They (2016) also found, as has been confirmed in other studies, that students in higher grades performed better than their younger counterparts (Chen et al., 2010). Because of this, they assert that proficiency, maturity, and experiences in online learning are also important factors to consider when determining student readiness for online learning.

Kuama and Intharaksa (2016) created four powerful implications of their study to pass on to others. First, technology can create a host of problems that lead to student disengagement, so instructors need to be available to help with this as much as possible (Appana, 2008; Kuama & Intharaksa, 2016; Tyler-Smith, 2006). Second, instructors need to create an online class/platform that is intuitive and pragmatic. Cognitive overload needs to be avoided at all costs (Kuama & Intharaksa, 2016; Tyler-Smith, 2006; Salmon, 2004). Third, they recommend that students should be trained in the OLLS before and throughout the course (Kuama & Intharaksa, 2016). Additionally, they said that the orientation to the class should be inspiring in order to garner motivation (Kuama & Intharaksa, 2016). Furthermore, they recommend that teachers make frequent contact with students in order to motivate the students to complete their responsibilities and take control of their learning (Appana, 2008; Kuama & Intharaksa, 2016). Lastly, they

recommend that students be measured for readiness for an online class (Kuama & Intharaksa, 2016). Instructors should survey students in order to understand their learning style and preferences, comfort with technology, motivation, and ability to regulate themselves in a self-directed learning environment (Kuama & Intharaksa, 2016).

### ***Language Learning Strategies***

It goes without saying that learning a second language as a teen or adult is not easy, it takes a concerted effort to attain native like fluency in reading, writing, and oral communication. Learning strategies play an integral role in this process, along with motivation. Adnan, Ibrahim, and Nordin (2013) explored the relationship between these two concepts, confirming that learning strategies have an effect on motivation. They define a learning strategy as a "process developed by students during learning to improve the quality of learning and help students achieve their respective goals" (Adnan et al, 2013, p. 33). Learning strategies are nested under the concept of self-regulated learning (SLR) an which refers to "self-generated thoughts, feelings, and actions that are planned and cyclically adapted to the attainment of personal goals"(Garcia, Pintrich, McKeachie, and Smith, 1991, p. 14). Martinez-Pons and Zimmerman (1986) found 14 frequently used academic self-regulated learning strategies which include: self-evaluation, organizing and transforming, goal setting and planning, seeking information, keeping record and monitoring, environmental structuring, self-consequences, rehearsing and memorizing, seeking peer assistance, seeking teacher assistance, seeking adult assistance, reviewing tests, reviewing notes and reviewing texts. These self-regulated learning strategies are



simply tools that must be harnessed with motivation, which can be defined as one's internal need to act in order to satisfy a desire (Yates, 2004).

Adnan et al.'s (2013) study aimed to understand the relationship between these two factors in student learning success. They divided the self-regulated learning strategies into three categories: metacognitive self-regulation, organization strategy, and peer learning. Metacognitive self-regulation is being aware of whether one comprehends something, how well one is performing on a given task, and being able to evaluate a final product and one's efficiency in making that product (Adnan et al., 2013). Organizing strategies help learners to actively connect and group concepts (Adnan et al., 2013). Lastly, peer learning is communicating and collaborating with classmates to build or refine one's understanding (Adnan et al. 2013). They (2013) hypothesize that all three of the categories of self-regulated learning strategies have an effect on motivation.

To research the relationship between learning strategies and motivation they (2013) surveyed 159 undergraduate students studying Arabic to what strategies they employed in their daily learning. The results of their study showed that metacognitive self-regulation and organization had a strong correlation with motivation (Adnan et al. 2013). The implications of the study were that teachers should give their students a similar questionnaire to determine how they could help struggling students (Adnan et al. 2013). Similar to Kuama & Intharaksa, (2016) Adnan et al. state that language teachers could be helped in finding out a students specific issue in language learning by understanding the way the students' methods of learning (2013).

## **Motivation**

As can be seen in the previous study, Adnan et al. (2013), motivated students are much more likely to use online learning strategies, which are known to correlate with successful online learning experiences. Therefore, it is important to understand more about motivation, its relationship with online learning, and how instructors can cultivate it in their students to help them in their online learning experiences.

### ***Self-Determination Theory***

Dron, Hartnett, and St. George (2011) examined the previous and current knowledge of motivation and how it correlates with online distance learning environments. With the incredible expansion of online learning, researchers have sought to understand why there are still high dropout rates in these classes (Adnan et al., 2013; Appana, 2008; Dron et al., 2011; Tyler-Smith, 2006). Poor motivation has been cited as one of the most crucial factors contributing to this.

Motivation is an abstract concept, but can be defined as a force that instigates and sustains activity directed toward a goal (Meece, Pintrick, & Schunck, 2008). It has been traditionally thought of in two ways, intrinsic and extrinsic. Dron et al. (2011) state that many studies have found online learning students to have more intrinsic motivation than their FTF (face-to-face) counterparts, but they believe that it is an oversimplification of the learning context and motivation to claim this as an absolute fact. In place of the mutually exclusive, dual choice between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, they believe that a better understanding of motivation can be had through Self-Determination Theory

(Dron et al., 2011). This theory has its foundations in the belief that all humans have an inner need to be self-determining, in other words, we need to feel like we have free will to direct ourselves. Secondly, we have a need to feel capable of doing what we need to do to be successful (Dron et al., 2011). Last, learners must feel a connection with others and their task environment. SDT theory states that if all of these elements are in place, students' motivation will be promoted (Dron et al., 2011). Conversely, Dron et al. (2011) state that the opposite of these three factors are contributors to amotivation. For instance, feelings of incompetence, an inability to affect an outcome, and a poor connection to the task at hand.

Dron et al.. (2011) make a point that motivation should not be viewed in a black and white dichotomy, instead, they contend it is a spectrum. On this spectrum from amotivation (non-self determined) to true intrinsic motivation, they (2011) have four categories. Beginning with the first level of motivation up from amotivation, we have “external regulation”(Dron et al., 2011)). This is best understood as simply punishments and rewards. Second, is “introjection” (Dron et al., 2011). This is when students instigate and sustain effort in an activity because they know others expect them to do so. Third up the scale from amotivation is “identified regulation” (Dron et al., 2011). Also a type of extrinsic motivation, identified regulation is when students engage in activity because of the benefit or utility that will come from it. Because the relevance of an activity to a learner's life is an important element in promoting student engagement, this type of motivation should not be overlooked (Beaven, Gutierrez, & Motzo, 2017, Dron et al., 2011). Last, and opposite of amotivation, is “integration” (Dron et al, 2011). This is

simply when a learner chooses to instigate and sustain effort because of an internal belief that it is significant to their sense of self. It has been found that the farther up the spectrum from amotivation one goes, the more self-determined a learner is. This is important because research has found that self-determined students experience more desirable outcomes (Adnan et al, 2013; Appana, 2008; Dron et al., 2011; Tyler-Smith, 2006).

Through their research Dron et. al (2011) found that both extrinsic and intrinsic motivations were found to co-exist and that their use was highly dependent on the situation at hand. In looking at the spectrum, it can be seen that both identified regulation and integration stand apart in that stand apart from external regulation and introjection in that they are more autonomous; the motivation to act comes from the free will of the learner (Dron et al., 2011). Bringing back the three elements of self-determination theory: sense of control, competence, and connectedness; Dron et al. (2011) make these recommendations to teachers. Students' will have a variety of motivations, but students should be pushed to find their self-determined reasons for engaging in a task. Dron et al. (2011) recommend teachers give meaningful choices to give students a sense of agency. Also, they should make the relevance of a task and its relation to their goals and interests as salient as possible (Dron et al., 2011). Finally, they should be attentive to the abilities and needs of students so that they may feel capable of engaging with the task at hand (Dron et al., 2011).

### ***Future Time Perspective and Expectancy/Value***

A staggering fact comparing distance learning and campus-based programs shows us that 80% of students graduated while attending on-campus classes, while only 20% of distance learning students graduate (Hobson & Puruhito, 2018). Because of this great difference in graduation rates, coupled with the continual rise of distance learning enrollments, Hobson and Puruhito (2018) sought to understand what contributes to the learning and achievement enrolled in distance learning courses. Hobson and Puruhito (2018) used the "future time perspective" (FTP) to examine how motivation affects online class performance. This theory "explains how perceptions and anticipations of future goals affect individuals' motivation for the task at hand" (Hobson & Puruhito, 2018, pg. 130). The element of this theory in focus for their study is connectedness. This is simply one's ability to draw connections between tasks at hand and a person's vision of their future (Hobson & Puruhito, 2018). "Researchers agree that by late adolescence students' mental representations of the future influence their academic motivation (Husman, J. and Shell, D., 2008, p. 166).

The other important theory that Hobson and Puruhito considered is the expectancy-value theory, which states that an "individual's choice, persistence, and performance can be explained by their belief about how well they do on the activity (expectancy) and the extent to which they value the activity (value)" (Hobson & Puruhito, 2018, p. 131). The first element of this theory is self efficacy, which is one's beliefs about their abilities (Hobson & Puruhito, 2018). In a classroom setting, this means that a student who believes themselves to be unable to perform a task will most likely be

much less likely to accomplish it (Hobson & Puruhito, 2018; Chen et al, 2010; Chen et al, 2008). The second element of this theory is the value part, which can be termed "instrumentality"(Hobson & Puruhito, 2018). This is the idea that something will be of future use. It comes in three types: endogenous, exogenous, and extrinsic (Hobson & Puruhito, 2018). Endogenous instrumentality is the belief that engaging in the task itself is important and useful for achieving long term future goals. Exogenous instrumentality does not value the task as individually important, but believes that completion of the task to be helpful for long term goals. The last type, extrinsic instrumentality stands has no regard for the task at all and simply values the outcome itself. Hobson and Puruhito (2018) found that extrinsic instrumentality used knowledge-building strategies the least.

What both of these theories, Future Time Perspective and Expectancy/Value, have in common is their ability for students to connect their academic tasks to their future goals for themselves. This ability has been reported to be connected with greater use of knowledge-building skills, which in turn is correlated with academic achievement (Hobson & Puruhito, 2018; Husman, J. and Shell, D., 2008). Self efficacy of distance learning, one's conception of their own abilities, was a great predictor of student satisfaction (Hobson & Puruhito, 2018). Those with self efficacy were also found to score high in their use of connectedness and knowledge-building skills, and therefore had higher grades (Hobson & Puruhito, 2018). Because of the powerful role self-efficacy was found to play in learning and performance, teachers must do their best to improve students' beliefs about their abilities. Hobson and Puruhito also (2018) recommend that teachers seek ways to help students define their future goals and create opportunities for

students to reflect on how the classroom activities connect to those goals. These opportunities will allow students to see the value, put in the work, and gain knowledge and skills.

### ***Motivation in Language Learning***

Previous studies have shown that a clear correlation: motivated students use learning strategies , and the use of these strategies creates a higher likelihood of online learning success (Adnan et al, 2013; Appana, 2008; Dron et al., 2011; Tyler-Smith, 2006). Additionally, students that are able to connect their present choices with the effect of those choices on their future have higher levels of motivation, which in turn produces better academic outcomes (Hobson & Puruhito, 2018; Husman, J. and Shell, D., 2008). Therefore, it is necessary to understand how motivation relates specifically to language learning.

### **Motivation and Age in a Language Learning Classroom**

Becirovic (2017) notes that in our time of being, learning English is a necessity for all. The international prominence and utility of the English language gives great value to those who learn it, but as Naw Sant (2018) notes, many students lose their motivation and fail to attain communicative fluency.

The age of learners has a strong relationship with one's ability to learn a language, and this stems from the changes in motivation that individuals go through as they mature and their interests change (Becirovic, 2017). Becirovic (2017) states that when children are learning a second language, they are simultaneously learning the same vocabulary in their own language, creating a mutually beneficial situation. Namely, the brain is open

and ready to make new associations. Conversely, as one ages, the ability to learn anything new begins to decline at age 20 (Becirovic, 2017).

Wilkins (2018) stated that one typically learns a language for its instrumental value or its integrative value. If one learns a language for its instrumental value, it is because the language will have practical value for the learner (Wilkins, 2018).

Conversely, one might learn a language for its integrative value if the language reflects a personal interest in the culture and people that the language represents (Wilkins, 2018).

Therefore, it is especially important to understand how to motivate students at each age level, as their ability to learn the different facets of language will be anything but homogenous. In Becirovic's (2017) study, they found that young students, fifth graders, had the highest level of motivation and the high school students had much lower motivation. The study also confirmed that motivation results in achievement. It was found that extrinsic motivators were more influential at a young age, and conversely, intrinsic motivation was more influential at older ages (Becirovic, 2017).

This finding is an important element for teachers to take into consideration when designing curriculum and activities. Namely, if teachers are going to be successful in teaching older learners, they need to find a way to ignite the learner's inner desire to learn because external motivators like grades, rewards, and punishments are not sufficient.

### **Motivational Factors in a Language Learning Classroom**

Naw Sant (2018) categorized the factors into five groups: teacher, teaching methodology, text, task, and test. In regards to the teacher, the following characteristics were listed as having an influence on student motivation: enthusiasm, friendliness, care



for students, humor, fairness, and patience. It was also noted that a teacher's knowledge of content and ability to model that knowledge was also critical (Naw Sant, 2018). The second category, teaching methodology as a motivational factor, states that teachers need to be able to employ different methods to meet the needs of different kinds of students (Naw Sant, 2018; Thornbury, 1997). Additionally, they need to be in touch with the abilities and needs of the students in order to backfill the necessary background knowledge and support the pre-skills needed to engage with the task at hand. Considering the text as a motivational factor, it simply must be at an appropriate level so that it is able to be comprehended by the students and will not contribute to cognitive overload (Naw Sant, 2018; Tyler-Smith, 2006). Additionally, it needs to be relevant to student interests (Chen et al, ; Naw Sant, 2018). Looking at the task as a motivational factor, it was noted that students will attempt a task when they feel they can be successful (Dron et al., 2008). Also, taking into consideration the expectancy-value view of motivation, students will be more willing to engage in a task that they understand to further their personal goals (Beaven, Gutierrez, & Motzo, 2017, Dron et al., 2011). The last element of motivation that was researched in their study is tests. Tests can negatively affect motivation because they tend to make students focus on the performance rather than the learning. "An examination-oriented classroom becomes a source of frustration, fear of failure, feeling of anxiety, and a fertile breeding group for the development of an excessive spirit of competition and other negative feelings and attitudes towards learning" (Naw Sant, 2018, p. 206). Additionally, Amrein and Berliner (2003) say that tests make students less intrinsically motivated and less likely to engage in critical thinking. On the other hand,

alternative assessment can allow students to create and demonstrate a connection between what students have learned and how it is used in the real world (Chen et al., 2008). This can, in turn, lead to a greater motivation to engage in class activities (Naw Sant, 2018). Though teachers cannot directly make students motivated, it is clear from this study that their personal behavior and choices in teaching methodologies, texts, activities, and tests can directly influence it.

### **Language Pedagogy and Tactics in Online Learning**

#### ***Noticing/Output***

Zhang (2012) explains the importance of noticing in second language development and how to promote its occurrence within the classroom. Noticing is said to be an important part of the process of knowledge acquisition, and in the case of linguistics, it concerns focusing on the language features used in an utterance (Zhang, 2012; Swain, 1995). Linguistics scholars argue over whether this is a conscious process or not, but they generally agree that it is essential in order to process and learn language. A helpful definition of noticing proposes that there is not only a detection of form, or concentrated attention, but also a rehearsal element (Zhang, 2012). The idea of rehearsal means that a learner tries to put the new information in their memory. Another way of looking at noticing is that it acts as an active facilitator between input and our memories. Schmidt (2001) makes an important distinction, that without noticing, input could not become intake.

An essential study to mention in this topic is Swain's (1995) research on the importance of output in language learning. Swain (1995) argued that with output, learners are able to "notice a gap between what they want to say and what they can say, leading them to recognize what they do not know, or only know partially" (Swain, 1995, p. 125). This recognition allows students to see more clearly their own errors, as well as how to fix them, which then leads to an advancement in their interlanguage (Schmidt, 2001). Because of the demonstrated importance of noticing, it is imperative that teachers find to help students convert more input into intake through noticing. Teaching learners to monitor their interlanguage and its differences with native languages will reap great benefits for their language learning journey.

### ***Feedback***

With noticing being held as a cornerstone in language development, it is necessary to discover what kinds of classroom tasks could encourage a noticing of the gap and intake of correct forms of language. Thornbury (1997) asserts that learners must continuously compare their language forms to that of native speakers, which in turn allows explicit knowledge to become internalized. Teachers should take care to make targeted features of language as obvious as possible to aid in the transition from input to intake. Corrective feedback is a very common way to do this, but it is not as effective as it is thought to be because the teacher's intentions aren't always passed on well (Adams, 2003; Thornbury, 1997). Thornbury (1997) proposes that noticing tasks provide both the data and the incentive for students to closely attend to the input form and compare it to

their own output. A teacher should want to create tasks that exemplify these two qualities.

Thornbury (1997) looks at two types of tasks that combine the incentive and data qualities. Reformulation, the first type of task examined, asks students to use whatever language students have to express a given meaning. The amount of guidance as to the content and form of the expression can be varied, but Thornbury (1997) suggests that content should be dictated by the students' needs and interests as much as possible. This style of task encourages students to dig deep to express themselves fully. In doing so, students will become self-aware of the gaps in their language, and will then be attentive to the reformulation that is completed by the teacher. When examining a reformulation, Thornbury (1997) states that students will notice the differences that apply to their level of learning. This allows for a great level of built-in differentiation, which in turn influences motivation (Chen et al, 2008; Naw Sant, 2018). The second type of task that is able to promote noticing well is a “dictogloss”. This activity requires that students listen to a short text once or twice, and then must attempt to recreate the story in pairs or groups. When the student version is compared with the original text, students will be able to see the differences in their output from the text, as well as the differences in their writing compared to their peers. This allows students to see the variety of possible responses, opening up new linguistic options for expression (Thornbury, 1997). In addition, just as the other activity did, different students will notice different things and these differences will match perfectly with each student's needs. These activities allow

students to notice a variety of language elements: morphological word endings, pronunciation, vocabulary, and syntax to name a few.

Corrective feedback can often discourage language learners, as well as confuse them (Adams, 2003; Thornbury, 1997). It is common practice to mark all of the errors on written work, but Adams (2003) asserts that this is not effective and can even be damaging. Students do not always understand what their errors are from written comments, and it is reported that students only passively look at the comments (Adams, 2003). This does not promote noticing the gap between their interlanguage and target forms of the language, and therefore it does not encourage language growth. Adams (2003) recommends reformulation as a task to avoid the pitfalls of traditional written feedback and this is supported by Thornbury's (1997) observations. A teacher's reformulation of student writing in this task preserves the content, but makes the form and phrasing as close to native-like as possible. An important part of this task is the one that follows called a "stimulated recall session", where the reformulated text is discussed alongside the original (Adams, 2003). Students are asked to give rationale for the changes that were made, which promotes noticing and therefore intake. In addition to this, errors are not pointed out to students. This requires students to do the work of examining the differences between the texts and in turn, gaining helpful feedback that they can implement themselves (Adams, 2003).

### ***Asynchronous Discussions***

Wilkins (2018) studied the role of asynchronous online collaboration and its effects on language learners. Understanding that motivation plays an integral role in

knowledge acquisition, they (2018) state that "the degree to which a learner attaches value to any given task establishes the level of motivation, and consequently, the level of commitment the learner will allocate to task completion" (Artino & McCoach, 2008, p. 101). Wilkins (2018) cites the importance of connecting learning activities to authentic and relevant real-world tasks can promote students' conscious perception of the value of the said activities. This therefore increases the motivation to participate with greater focus (Chen et al., 2008; Naw Sant, 2018). Wilkins (2018) believes that asynchronous learning needs to be taken advantage of because it is clear through social media, which is asynchronous and hugely popular, that students find this way of communicating to be authentic. Tying these two things together, motivation to acquire knowledge and asynchronous communication, they delve further into two reasons why learners pursue a language: instrumental and integrative.

Asynchronous online discussion (AOD) is the main way that online courses ask students to communicate. Wilkins (2018) believes that an AOD offers several advantages to language learners over a face to face (FTF) setting. For instance, learners are allowed to process input and prepare their output at their own pace (Wilkins, 2018). This prevents the anxiety that can offer a barrier to language learning. Additionally, the overall average level of participation among students is increased, as traditionally quiet students may feel comfortable sharing (Appana, 2008; Wilkins, 2018). Moreover, one of the greatest aspects of AOD is that the learner's sense of autonomy is increased because of the lack of dependency on a teacher (Wilkins, 2018). This feeling of autonomy in turn positively influences the students self-determination (Dron et al., 2008). There are also many

benefits that come from the collaboration amongst students in an AOD (Wilkins, 2018). As opposed to a FTF classroom where it is very easy for students to passively view content, engagement in the material is a responsibility for all students (Wilkins, 2018). Adding on to this fact, students are able to learn from and build on the knowledge of each other (Wilkins, 2018).

Some limitations of needing to collaborate with classmates are that oftentimes students within a group can be unresponsive, and then the workload can be distributed unequally (Wilkins, 2018). Teachers ought to make sure the work is directly related to the content of the course and their interests as well (Appana, 2008; Chen et al., 2010; Wilkins, 2018). Additionally, it is suggested that group norms be created so that each student will understand the expectations.

### ***Language Exchange***

Computer mediated learning is more and more common these days for a variety of reasons. Despite our world's globalization, monolingualism is still the norm in most countries. Learning how to become fluent in another language is very difficult without being able to interact with speakers of the target language on a daily basis. Language exchange programs can have a great impact on students' motivation and satisfaction (Beaven, Gutierrez, & Motzo, 2017).

Swain (2000) asserts that there are two types of noticing: noticing the gap and noticing the hole. “Noticing the gap” is when a learner becomes aware of the difference between their interlanguage and the target language, whereas “noticing the hole” is when a learner is made aware that they do not have the means in their interlanguage to express

themselves as they'd like (Baleghizadeh & Arab, 2011). In their study, Baleghizadeh and Arab (2011) found in their pair work study that their learners, when pressed to find solutions to holes in their language, were able to fill those gaps or at least take on a metalinguistic orientation that promoted a higher frequency of noticing. It was noted that at times, if the partner was not sufficiently knowledgeable, they wouldn't be able to provide helpful feedback (Baleghizadeh & Arab, 2011). In turn, it is necessary for a teacher to be present or to make sure partners are chosen wisely.

Guevara, Ordóñez, & Tolosa (2017) studied the impact of a online language exchange program, in other words, cross culture and language pen pals. This kind of exercise was found to be very beneficial for a variety of reasons. First, asynchronous online communication allows more time for learners to attend to the form and content present in the text (input) (Guevara, Ordóñez, C. & Tolosa, 2017) Additionally, they then naturally have more time to collect and refine their thoughts before putting them into writing. This gives more time for learners to think about the forms they are using, not just content (Guevara, Ordóñez, & Tolosa, 2017). The social cost of an error in this format is severely altered for the better, which allows students to attempt new ways of communicating without fear of losing face (Guevara, Ordóñez, & Tolosa, 2017). Second, this type of exercise is supported by Vygotsky's prominent educational theory, the zone of proximal development. This theory states that one learns best when interacting with someone who can challenge and guide the learner just beyond where their working knowledge ends. In their study, Guevara et al. (2017) had Spanish speakers in Columbia writing in English to native English speakers in New Zealand who were writing back in



Spanish. This gave perfect opportunities for peers to have a real audience and speak about topics that were of interest, which research supports as the most effective ways to engage students in their learning (Appana, 2008; Chen et al., 2010; Guevara, D., Ordóñez, C. & Tolosa, C., 2017; Wilkins, 2018). Students reported that corrections made them feel confident and stimulated in their learning (Guevara, D., Ordóñez, C. & Tolosa, C., 2017). They also reported to be very motivated to read and respond to their partner's messages. Guevara et al. (2017) also found that there was an increased amount of conscious reflection on form, which allowed students to notice the gaps in their own language. This development of a metalinguistic perspective is integral to advancement in language study (Schmidt, 2001; Swain, 1995; Guevara et al., 2017).

### ***Online Learning Tools***

Social media, blogs, wikis, and many other kinds of media are an ever present means of communication in today's world. These tools can provide great opportunities for language learning, but they require a close examination in order to understand their benefits and limitations. Because we know that activities that line up with students interests contribute to greater motivation and therefore better outcomes, it is imperative for researchers to understand what kinds of current tools available lend themselves well to language learners, both aiding in their language development and keeping their interest over an extended period of time (Beaven, Gutierrez, & Motzo, 2017; Dron et al., 2008; Chen et al; Naw Sant, 2018; 2011; Wilkins, 2018).

Swain (1995), who is responsible for the naming the output hypothesis, asserted that the mental faculties needed to move from merely comprehending input to producing

a grammatically and semantically accurate utterance are much greater. Therefore, finding ways to promote interaction and collaboration through the use of internet technologies amongst students will lead to a much higher frequency of output. Chakow (2018) found in her research that these tools promote affective learning through the enhancement of motivation, interest, and enjoyment. There are many reasons for this, one of which is that students that are learning a language can pursue topics of interest and have a real audience to view their output, and not just practice in isolation (Chakow, 2018). Students can go beyond the classroom and exercise their voice as a global citizen. Moreover, when students have the opportunity to view and study their peers' responses with as much frequency as they wish, their exposure to the language is greatly increased (Baleghizadeh & Arab, 2011; Chakow, 2018; Guevara, Ordóñez, & Tolosa, 2017). Furthermore, students are given the opportunity to revise their work and gain valuable practice time through each revision (Chakow, 2018). This is in contrast to a classroom environment where a spontaneous discussion or question and answer time does not allow for a second attempt (Chakow, 2018).

### **Literature Review Conclusion**

In search of the best practices for teaching language online, it became apparent that the greatest challenges to teaching in through this format were not particular to teaching language to language learners, but rather all online learners as a whole. My findings that promote effective teaching for online language learners can be summed up as follows. Online learning provides excellent benefits over face-to-face learning:

flexibility of space and time, a fast delivery of a plethora of materials, and anonymity that can lower significant social pressures faced in the traditional classroom. To avoid the pitfalls of online learning, the lack of student readiness, technology issues, and lack of engagement, teachers must train their students with their platform, stay engaged with students, and keep their content and tasks simple as to avoid cognitive overload and anxiety. In regards to the lack of preparedness, successful online learning requires more self-direction than face-to-face learning. Self-direction comes from understanding one's future goals and how the given task at hand is connected to those goals. If a teacher is able to create a classroom environment that helps students to feel competent, connected, and in control of their learning, students will be able to have the greatest chance of feeling self-directed. Additionally, teachers should advocate the use of specific learning strategies for the unique needs of their students. Finally, in order to help develop the language abilities of students, teachers should strive to use activities that promote the noticing of gaps and require analysis of the differences between student interlanguage and the target language. To make these activities as effective as possible, they should be relevant to student lives, have a real audience, and be free from corrective feedback that deters future output and self-analysis. In summary, there are many advantages that are afforded to online learning, with careful preparation and consistent communication, students can avoid the pitfalls of this format, make the most of the advantages, and have a successful online learning experience.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Project Description**

#### **Introduction**

Chapter three draws on research outlined in the literature review contained in Chapter two regarding the essential components for online language learning success: course design, student readiness, learning strategies, motivation, and tools to promote language acquisition. The following project seeks to answer the following question: What are the most effective ways to help language learners to be successful in an online learning format? The chapter begins by providing a description of my project, the rationale behind it, the context surrounding it, an outline of the implementation and how it will be evaluated, and finally a summary.

#### **Project Description**

In order to address my research question, it seemed most fitting to design a website that could be used both as a model and a resource for how educators can best design a class and teach students language through an online format. The website will take into consideration the importance of simplicity and clarity as to aid in the

transmission of what I've learned. The landing page will demonstrate the need for my project, namely, that only 20% of distance learning students graduate because students are not prepared for the amount of self-regulation needed to be successful (Adnan et al., 2013; Appana, 2008; Dron et al., 2011; Hobson & Purhuhito, 2018; Tyler-Smith, 2006). In addition to the landing page, there would be a drop down menu that would allow a website visitor to click on a page for each of the themes that I researched: benefits, limitations, and recommendations for online learning, learning strategies and motivation, and effective language learning tools. On each page, I will share important facts that I have learned from my research on each theme. Finally, I will have a page with my contact information, plus a "speakpipe.com" button that will model and provide an easy way to provide a way to easily send a voicemail through the click of a button.

### **Rationale**

I have sought to understand how a teacher can take advantage of online learning to help online language learning students. In doing so, there are many limitations or challenges to online learning that have to be addressed; how to help a student be ready for online learning, to motivate students, how to teach them self-regulation strategies, what kinds of online activities are the most effective for language learning. My rationale for choosing to make a website to add to the conversation on my research topic, online learning, is three fold. First, being that the very nature of my research topic is concerning online platforms made to deliver information, it seemed fitting that my findings should also be available in an online format. The information will be easily accessible from now

on, unlike a workshop or paper that may be forgotten or misplaced. Leading to my next reason, this allows me to not only provide information, but demonstrate how to do so in a manner that is not cognitively overwhelming, but informative in an easily digestible manner. I designed it this way because of Tyler-Smith's (2006) study that looked at the reasons for high dropout rates of online classes. It concluded that cognitive overload and a lack of strategies to navigate the learner management system interface and content were critical factors (Adnan et al., 2013; Appana, 2008; Tyler-Smith, 2006; Dron et al., 2011; Hobson & Puruhito, 2018). An additional reference, Chen et al., states that "Content [in an online format] should be carefully designed and presented sparingly" (2008, 14). In addition to the pleasing presentation of the information, I used a variety of media mediums to aid in my communication efforts. My third and final reason for demonstrating my research findings with a website is that I hope to create a space of continuous collaboration. The collective knowledge that will come from the millions of educators participating in online learning for the first time could bring powerful insights. This type of asynchronous collaboration across time and space is one of the most beneficial aspects of online learning over a traditional format (Chen et al., 2008) .

The learning paradigm that I am using to pass on my findings is cognitivism. I am sharing information for educators to learn and apply to their practice. I have focused on organizing and sequencing the information I've learned from my research to allow for the most effective transfer of knowledge. The adult learning theory that I am using is "self directed learning" because I am providing information to those who will be seeking it. They will have to choose to engage with the material and apply it at their own will.

The website creator that I used Google Sites. I have chosen this because it is a user friendly and free method of sharing information. I did not want to choose a method that would make the platform more prominent than the content. Additionally, because so many educators use google products like google docs and google slides, it is easier for educators to access my information.

### **Audience and Setting**

The audience of my project are the educators of the district where I am employed as an English Learner teacher. Most of my fellow educators, as well as myself, are new to the instructor side of online learning. Additionally, there are educators worldwide who are experiencing the same situation. Aside from the coronavirus pandemic creating a huge need for educators to quickly get up to speed on how to effectively teach online, there already has been an exponential trend of demand for online learning educators. Because of this, I believe there should be great interest in my research, as well as input that could further our collective understanding as to how to create an effective online learning experience for language learners.

My website has shared through my school district email, and it is publicly available as well. I am soliciting feedback and contributions from visitors. As mentioned, my goal is not just to share what I've learned, but to create a space where educators can contribute what they have learned. Whether new to online learning or not, together we can strengthen our understanding of what helps students achieve.

## **Project Outline and Timeline**

This project has two essential parts: the creation of a website that will demonstrate my findings and a page that invites educators to share their thoughts and findings. The website will be created in June, using Google Sites, a free and user friendly platform. An invitation through email will be sent to educators to view my website and share their thoughts on how to create an effective learning environment for language learners. Finally, I will synthesize the findings from my research and those of my peers to create a simple, yet comprehensive tool to aid educators in their future online teaching pursuits.

## **SUMMARY**

Online learning is here to stay and is becoming an essential part of educators, students, and parents lives. The current pandemic situation certainly underscores this fact. Therefore, it is for the benefit of all these stakeholders that I have researched the themes of online learning, online learning strategies, motivation, and key strategies for language learning. Synthesizing this information and making it easily available for others to learn from and build on seems like an imperative task.



## **Chapter 4**

### **Background for Writing**

#### **Introduction**

Researching the answer to my question: “What are the most effective ways to help language learners to be successful in an online learning format?” has been an informative and formative journey. In this chapter, I will be reiterating impetus for my research. Next, I will break down the most important findings in my literature review, and share the most important connections made. Then, I will summarize the implications, limitations, and recommendations based on my research. Finally, I will make clear the benefit my research and project bring to my peers and profession.

#### **Context**

Because of the global coronavirus pandemic of 2020, understanding how to do online learning well has become a necessity for educators. In addition to this, I have had my own online learning experiences that have left me with many questions. I am normally a good student, but online learning as a student has always been difficult for me, and I saw that many of my good students have struggled with it, too. A staggering fact comparing distance learning and campus-based programs shows us that 80% of students graduated while attending on-campus classes, while only 20% of distance learning students graduate (Hobson & Puruhito, 2018). Online learning, though it has clear advantages over face-to-face learning such as the flexibility of time and space, it is

not without significant challenges that must be addressed in order for students to be successful.

Understanding how these challenges, a lack of readiness, technology issues, and engagement issues can be remedied, and how educators can create a successful language learning experience in an online classroom has been my goal. In order to answer my research question, I researched a variety of peer reviewed journal articles to learn more about online learning, learning strategies, motivation, and effective language learning activities.

### **Literature Review**

Throughout my research it became clear that, though I was hoping to learn about online language learners, the struggles faced by these learners are, at their core, very similar to all online learners. As it has been mentioned, a limitation on the effectiveness of online learning is that learners are often not sufficiently ready for the amount of self-directed learning that naturally takes place (Kuama & Intharaksa, 2016). The lack of self-direction among learners was a clear theme and was the reason I sought to research and better understand motivation and learning strategies. In doing so, I found powerful research that demystified motivation and made clear its influence on academic outcomes and language learning.

In place of viewing motivation in the traditional dichotomous manner, being either intrinsic (from within) or extrinsic (from outside), Dron et al. (2011) purport that motivation exists on a spectrum of self-determination. They (2011) state that we all have

an inner need to be self-determining, in other words, we need to feel like we have free will to direct ourselves. Secondly, we have a need to feel capable of doing what we need to do to be successful (Dron et al., 2011). Last, learners must feel a connection with others and their task environment. This was confirmed by much of the research I read. Students that are able to connect their present choices with the effect of those choices on their future have higher levels of motivation, which in turn produces better academic outcomes (Beaven, Gutierrez, & Motzo, 2017; Chakow, 2018; Hobson & Puruhito, 2018; Husman, J. and Shell, D., 2008).

In regards to my research regarding teaching language, there were clear connections with my research on motivation. Classroom environments that ask students to do things that they are capable of, wherein there is a choice to pursue something that is relevant to their own interests, will have better outcomes (Chakow; Wilkins, 2008). This leads to my section where I discuss the implications and limitations of my research.

### **Implications, Limitations, and Recommendations**

My research has produced powerful implications. The lack of success that is common in online learning requires educators to address the issues of student readiness, technology, and engagement.

In order to address student readiness, students should be given a survey to understand their strengths and weaknesses in online learning. Then, teachers ought to take a plan with each student addressing the results of the survey to aid in their self-directed learning. Additionally, students should be given opportunities to practice the

platforms and methods of communication that they'll be expected to use. Most importantly regarding readiness, teachers need to take into consideration the importance of motivation and their role cultivating it. Consider the three C's from Dron et al. (2011), give your students a sense of competence, control, and connectedness in order to help them discover their motivation and pursue it persistently.

Although it is clear that motivation is necessary for academic success in an online format, it is not clear how much of an effect an instructor can have in cultivating it. For example, one study concluded that "students' maturity may play an important role in their monitoring, managing, control, and motivation relative to online learning" (Chen et al, p. 2010, 1087). If "maturity" is an important factor in the academic success of our online learning students, our chances of affecting academic outcomes seem bleak. More research regarding an instructor's influence on their students maturity is needed.

In regards to the issues caused by technology, the old adage "less is more" will suffice. However, this is much easier said than done. It can be difficult to know how much information and explanation is necessary or helpful from a student's perspective, but the risk of cognitive overload, the ensuing anxiety, and its impact are great enough that teachers must take great care when designing their platforms and activities. They ought to Minimize both the amount of technology and expertise needed to engage with your content. Also, teachers should create robust and relevant, but limited assignments that address a variety of learning objectives. Following these recommendations should limit the potential for cognitive overload and interference from technology issues.

Because of the relative novelty of online learning and the number of professionals new to the format, there are not standard practices to draw from that could aid in preventing teachers from over complicating their content, confusing their students, and ultimately creating an unsuccessful learning environment. More research is needed to find the standard practices that produce a course of this type.

Lastly, though a benefit of online learning is the fact that you study from anywhere, this means that it can be harder for students to stay engaged with the teacher, the content, and their peers. This lack of engagement is one of the major issues with online learning that must be addressed. Teachers ought to provide frequent opportunities for students to interact with the instructor, as well as each other, in academic and social capacities. They should schedule check-in times to review student progress and give individual feedback. Also, it is important to keep close track of students who have not participated and reach out to them as soon as possible to understand their situation and help them get back on track.

Personally, within my own classes and my district as a whole, there was a large percentage of our student body who did not respond to any type of communication at all during the pandemic during the spring of 2020. This makes for a severe obstacle in engagement that is not easily overcome, even with the said recommendations. Anecdotally, I have heard fellow educators from other districts report that their rates of engagement were higher when classes were held at certain times synchronously. Perhaps for those who lack the “maturity” to perform academically in a self-directed setting,

synchronous learning would be better. None of my research mentioned synchronous classes, therefore, it is necessary to research this reported phenomena further.

### **Benefit of My Research and Project to the Profession**

As has been mentioned, in addition to the already growing popularity of online learning prior to the pandemic of 2020, nearly 1.5 billion students and over 60 million teachers had their school doors close and many of them were thrown into the throes of online education (Strauss, 2020). It goes without saying, there are many educators who are looking for advice on how to teach in an online format. My research has shown the importance of creating a classroom environment that promotes self-regulation in order to minimize the impact of a lack of readiness, keeps the content and technology as simple as possible, and engages students as much as possible in order to create a successful learning environment. Educators can use the summarized findings in my website to further their understanding of these important factors and implement them into their own classrooms. Additionally, it is my hope that the design of my website will demonstrate how to deliver information in a visually appealing way that does not overwhelm.

### **Conclusion**

Completing my research and project has challenged me to think deeply about how I ought to design and prepare for the classes I teach. The role of the educator in an online class is much more facilitative, the students interact more with the course and its setup than the instructor. Therefore, a well thought out and implemented approach is essential to create a successful learning experience (Grant & Hill, 2006; Salmon, 2004). Regarding

the research, a task of this magnitude was completely new to me. Because of early failures in this endeavor, I was forced to struggle through and ultimately learn a lot about what it simply means to read and review research. I plan to carry my researchers eye for truth, corroboration, and gaps into my future. Additionally, because I created a website to demonstrate my findings, I now feel comfortable making a website for my own classroom which will be a great way to apply what I've learned in my research. Although this was a difficult task and process, I'm thankful to have learned more about this timely topic, and I hope that my knowledge will be helpful to teachers and students alike.

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